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12. OCCURRENCE OF GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD *ARDEOTIS NIGRICEPS* AT HOSUR, NASHIK DISTRICT, MAHARASHTRA

Three great Indian bustards *Ardeotis nigriceps* were sighted by one of us (BR) at the Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) complex at Hosur, 20 km from Nashik towards Dhulia, on National Highway 3 on September 2, 1998. On subsequent visits, a single bird was sighted on September 24, 1998, and three birds on September 25, 1998. The birds are seen regularly on the runway by the Air Traffic Control (ATC) staff (Mr. Kale *pers. comm.*). Two chicks were observed in 1998, while displaying males are regularly sighted in the monsoon. According to the ATC staff, a maximum of nine birds have been recorded in the area, since at least 1974 (Mr. Kale *pers. comm.*).

The HAL complex is a huge area, encircled by a 13.5 km perimeter wall. Most of the 14.3 sq. km area is open grassland, except for the small area occupied by the office and factory buildings. The HAL complex is largely used to repair military aircraft, which are test flown from a runway that almost bisects the grassland.

The area is gently undulating, dominated by the forbs of *Borreria* sp. and *Boerhavia* sp., and grasses of *Chrysopogon* sp. The vegetation height is about 1.5 m. There are a few scattered *Acacia nilotica* trees and *Ziziphus* bushes. There is no human activity except for the occasional flying military aircraft, and movement of security personnel between the outposts. There is no cattle grazing, while grass is burnt only along the runway by the authorities during summer. Good grass growth is observed within the inner perimeter wall, which is a high security area.

But between the inner and outer perimeter walls and beyond the outer perimeter wall, the area has been denuded by livestock grazing.

There was no record of the bustard in Nashik district (Rahmani 1989), although it was recorded in the neighbouring districts of Ahmednagar and Dhulia. Rahmani (1989) mentions unconfirmed reports of its occurrence in Nashik district. We think it worth putting on record the first confirmed sighting of this highly threatened species from a hitherto unreported site.

The fact that these birds are present in the area at least since 1974, and the scientific community was oblivious to their presence, calls for renewed intensive efforts to identify areas where bustard populations are still present. This should give a better understanding of its status in the country. Constant monitoring of the population will tell whether bustards are seen in this area throughout the year, or that they come only for breeding.

The only threat to the bustards in this high security area are flying aircrafts, but since the flight frequency is very low, the probability of an aircraft hitting a bustard is also low.

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13. SIGHTING OF SOCIABLE LAPWING *VANELLUS GREGARIUS* IN KACHCHH DISTRICT, GUJARAT

While on a field trip to Lala Bustard Sanctuary, in Abdasa taluka, Kachchh district, we sighted a pair of sociable lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* on December 29, 1998 at 0900 hrs, feeding in a ploughed field close to Lala village. The birds were in non-breeding or winter plumage, and were foraging actively. The ploughed field was set amidst fallow land and degraded grassland. The birds had a very distinct white supercilium, a black eye-stripe extending to the nape, and a black crown. The upper part of the bird was ashy brown and the entire belly was white. The bill and legs were somewhat black. Our efforts to find the birds again the next day were in vain.

This species is threatened globally and considered vulnerable (Collar *et al.* 1994). The last sighting in Kachchh was in August 1947 (G.M.B. Sparks, unpublished data; M.K. Himmatsinhji, *pers. comm.*). Dharmakumarsinhji (1956) has mentioned that it is an irregular visitor, not common and usually seen during the cold (winter) months. Ali and Ripley (1995) have also mentioned that it is a migrant, found in dry wastelands, ploughed fields and stubble. Collar *et al.* (1994) say that it uses grasslands and wetlands, including littoral habitats.

The sociable lapwing is said to breed in southeastern Russia and to migrate south to North Africa and India, including Kachchh and other parts of Gujarat (Dharmakumarsinhji 1956).